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생활과학석사 학위논문

# Back to Korea: Returnees' Readjustment Experiences of Growing Up in Two Cultures

청소년기 유학생들의 귀국 후, 재적응 경험

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# Back to Korea: Returnees' Readjustment Experiences of Growing Up in Two Cultures

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## ABSTRACT

# Back to Korea: Returnees' Readjustment Experiences of Growing Up in Two Cultures

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This research investigated the challenges which Korean returnees experienced during their process of readjustment to Korea. This narrative study examined the stories of successively readjusted returnees whom at least studied abroad since high school in the United States. In-depth interviews were conducted with returnees to understand their overall life in Korea. The followings were the research questions for this study.

1. What stereotypes or difficulties did these returnees encounter as they successively readjusted to the Korean society?
2. What kind of cultural differences did they face?
3. How do the returnees define themselves?

To conduct this narrative study, ten Korean returnees (5 male, 5 female) were recruited and selected by using purposeful sampling. The collected data were analyzed by using narrative inquiry, content and thematic analysis. The results showed that all participants went through reverse culture shock and experienced difficulties in (a) boundary ambivalence between ideological orientations, (b) stereotypes on returnees, (c) no hesitation when expressing their opinions, (d) high self confidence in English: strength and stress and (e) interpersonal communication difficulties. As a result, the findings provide a general data about Korean returnees and can be applied as a reference to future studies related to repatriated adult returnees readjusting to their home countries.

주요어 : returnees, repatriate, readjustment, re-acculturation, life satisfaction, difficulties

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Many recent studies focused on the Korean education system and the parents' opinions towards it. The Korean society's ardor for education is high and increasing continuously, which stretched to sending children overseas to study abroad at young age. As studying abroad helps students experience the world first-hand (Warner, 2009), starting from 1995, 2,259 of these children were sent overseas by their parents during their elementary, middle, or high school years to a foreign country where they believe to have a better developed education system. The population of children studying abroad increased as Korea went through a rapid economic growth, and by the year of 2006, the Korean Educational Development Institute announced 29,511 children were studying abroad. Most of these parents sent their children off to countries, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and England, to attend school (Cho, 2007). Many parents decided to send their children overseas to study abroad at the host country because they are unsatisfied with the Korean education system and wish their children to speak their second language fluently like a native speaker (KEDI, 2006). According to the database provided by the United States state Korean international students (4.8%) had the largest population among all international student population, which is



followed by Germany (3.6%) and France (2.1%) (Ministry of Education, 2007; OECD, 2011). Along with the increase of the population of international students since 2006, upon the completion of their studies, international students who became adults started to repatriate back to their home country, Korea. The Korean Educational Statistics Service (2012) provides statistic data, which indicates there were 29,511 international students at 2006 and this decreased to 18,118 at 2009. In the other hand, those who repatriated back to Korea increased from 18,362 (2006) to 23,698 (2009).

According to the research conducted by the Korean Educational Development Institute (2006), 47.8% of the international students wish to come back to Korea after they finish their studies and this number is continuously increasing. Previous studies mentioned better employment or business was listed as the most influential predictors for re-migration (Chiang, 2004; Chiang & Liao, 2008). As international students realized finding employment in the host country was difficult, due to the economic slump, they believe they have better chances for employment and business at their home country. For this reason, they no longer feel the need to remain in the host country and decided to repatriate. Similar issues also happened in Taiwan, due to Taiwan's fast development of economic factors, especially chances for better employment, business and social support network. This has

instigated the repatriation of Taiwanese international students to their home country (Guo & Rozario, 2003). As the return of the Korean international students is a recent phenomenon in Korea, there are limited studies about Korean adult returnees who completed their studies overseas. However, this is an issue which researchers must pay attention to, because well-adjusted returnees are human resources who can provide significant contribution to Korea's economic development such as bringing back different perspectives, skills, ideas and problem solving skills. Yet, if returnees decide to return back to the host country, due to the failure of readjustment, this is not only a national economic loss, but can also provoke social issues such as separated families.

Meanwhile, young people in industrialized or postindustrial societies now stay in school longer, marry later, and have their first child later when compared to the past (Arnett, 2000; White, 2003). Because marriage and parenthood are delayed until the mid or late twenties for most people, adulthood is gradually delayed. Many people between the ages of 18 to 25 do not see themselves as either adolescents or entirely as adults. For this reason, the significance of *emerging adulthood*, focusing especially on ages 18-25, is increasing. As adulthood has come to a delay, previous researches (Schwartz et al., 2009) discovered identity confusion during emerging adulthood. Despite of Erikson's belief where identity formation takes place in the

stage called “Identity versus Role Confusion” during adolescence, the postponement of adulthood has created emerging adults to explore more on their identity in three main areas: love, work and worldview. Hence, the focus of the current study is to investigate emerging adult returnees’ difficulties and life satisfaction, who continuously explored their identity during their successful readjustment to Korea.

Despite the increasing population of returnees in the Korean society, these repatriated returnees were not considered to be an issue. Only a few recent studies explore adult returnees’ readjustment in Japan (e.g., Kanno, 2000<sup>a</sup>; Moriyoshi, 2001; Yoshida et al., 2002, 2003) and identify various adjustment issues related to recent circumstances. However, many previous studies conducted in Korea are limited to elementary, middle school and adolescent returnees and mostly focus on issues related to school adaptation and adjustment improvement programs. As Korean returnees’ overseas experiences and knowledge, which were acquired as they studied abroad, can influence the returnees’ workplace and provide a positive influence towards the development of the Korean society overall, research and programs related to these adult returnees in general should be encouraged.

Many scholars note that the boundaries between collectivistic and individualistic orientations are blurred and coexist (Triandis, 1995; Smetana, 2002; Kaitcibasi, 2005; Weisner, 2002), as the world is

becoming increasingly interconnected due to globalization and internationalization - largely because of the Internet and the spread of Western culture around the world. However, Triandis (1995) provides evidence that individualism and collectivism may at times be inversely related, such that societies high in one tend to be low in the other. Since East Asian cultures are based on Confucianism, which is described as a set of principles that advance collectivist goals, emphasizes hard work and achievement (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008), Korea is more likely to be a collectivistic society. As these Korean returnees educated by Korean parents during their childhood and studied abroad overseas, they are exposed and influenced to both individualistic and collectivistic cultures directly during this sensitive period. For this reason, it is especially difficult to measure Korean returnees on a single bipolar dimension of Korean and American as they are rather “a strange mix of East and West” (Nagao, 1998; Kanno, 2000<sup>b</sup>, p.363), and might go through identity confusion.

Overcoming identity confusion, Korean returnees claim a new and unique identity as ‘returnees’ that do not belong to either groups of host or home country completely (Chiang & Liao, 2005) during the key processes of acculturation and re-acculturation. During the process of acculturation and re-acculturation, Korean returnees encounter difficulties and discomfort, which influence the distress they experience

as they repatriate, as well as psychological readjustment and overall satisfaction with the transition from the foreign culture to one's own home culture. These factors include 'reverse culture shock', negative attitude or stereotypes of home country individuals towards returnees, high expectations to utilize their acquired knowledge and overall life satisfaction with the transition. Gaw (2000) stated, almost every returnee experience reverse culture shock and commonly experience difficulties which include academic problems, cultural identity conflicts, social withdrawal, depression, anxiety, and interpersonal difficulties.

Many studies focused on the re-entry experiences for corporate repatriates, returning immigrants, missionaries, Peace Corps, parachute kids, third culture children and international students, but no study has been conducted on how returnees successively readjust smoothly into their workplaces as they return to their home countries (Antal, 2001; Adler, 1981, 1986; Cannon, 2000; Gaw, 2000; Gerner & Perry, 2000; Malewski, 2005; Raschio, 1987; Storti, 1990).

The purpose of this narrative study is to examine the stories and transitions of Korean returnees who studied overseas in the United States and successively readjusted to their workplaces. As the study examines the challenges and obstacles in which the Korean returnees faced during their re-entry to Korea, the goal of the study is to develop an in-depth understanding of these difficulties and their overall life

satisfaction in Korea. By investigating their process of re-acculturation to the Korean society, the findings of this research can then offer recommendations to institutions, and corporations to help the returnees readjust to their own cultures and benefit from their experiences. Moreover, this study can be applied as a reference to future studies related to repatriated adult returnees readjusting to their home countries.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review the concepts and literature about Korean returnees repatriating back to Korea. As the current study is about repatriating international students after their college graduation who became adults and completed their studies, the review will provide general information about international students. Then, it will continue to explain the process of acculturation. Next, general information about returnees will be explored. Finally, returnees' process of re-acculturation and readjusting factors will be reviewed.

### **Push abroad phenomenon in Korea**

On account of the Korean society's high ardor for education and parents' unsatisfaction towards the Korean education system, there has been an increase in the population of international students. Additionally, as the importance of acquiring fluency in second language and international experiences has come to a rise, due to Korea's economic growth, internationalization and globalization, this instigated a higher increase of international students studying abroad.

However, the steady increase of international students from 2000 to 2006 started to show a fall from 2007. The database presented by the Korean Educational Developmental Institute (2012) stated the

decreasing population of international students by 27,688 at 2007, 27,329 at 2008, 18,118 at 2009 and 18,741 at 2010. Here, a dramatic decrease can be detected at 2009. The decrease of international students might have been caused by Korea's economic crisis, which was impacted by the global financial crisis by the end of 2008. In contrast, according to the Korean Educational Development Institute database (2012), the population of returning international students increased by 20,277 at 2007, 22,263 at 2008, and 23,698 at 2009.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Korea defines international students as 'adolescents who spent more than 2 years overseas and attended a foreign school for more than 1 year during their elementary, middle or high school years'. At the same time, the Korean legislation defines international students as those who pursue or train academics or skills for more than 6 months at a foreign educational research or training institution (Fundamentals of Education Act No. 29, 3(2)). Based on the definitions above, the current study will define international students as 'unaccompanied minors who sojourn and study abroad starting from either elementary, middle or high school in the United States.

These international students were 'pushed' to study abroad in the past, due to the high competitive standards for prestigious universities to avoid shaming the family (Ying, 2001). Compared to the



past, nowadays, new motivations have been reported such as interest in learning new things, such as language, meeting new people, belief that achieving a foreign education degree will enhance and advance one's career, and a personal interest, curiosity and sense of enjoyment (Chirkov et al., 2008; Cho, 2002; The Korean Educational Development Institute, 2006). The decision of studying abroad is an important decision, in which many seek ways in order to enhance their career and learning opportunities (Singaravelu & Pope, 2007, p.37). When international students move and learn to adjust to a new cultural environment and accept the cultural differences within the host country (Klineberg, 1981) through the process of acculturation, they go through many challenges which they find frustrating. Acculturation is a process involving two or more groups of cultures, with consequences for both (Berry, 2001). In order to explain this process, the most well-used theory is the U-Curve Theory of Adjustment (Lysgaard, 1995). The U-Curve goes through 4 stages: Honeymoon stage, Culture Shock stage, Adjustment stage and Mastery stage <Figure 1>. During the 'Honeymoon stage,' individuals are fascinated by the new and different culture like honeymooners. Then as they gradually cope with the local conditions on daily basis, they experience the second stage – Culture Shock stage. This stage is known to be characterized by frustration and hostility towards the host nation and its people. As the individual

gradually adapts to the new norms and values of the host country and are capable to act more appropriately than they did before, they enter the third stage – Adjustment stage. Finally, in the Mastery stage, individuals are able to effectively function in the new culture. Although there are many various types of adjustment theories, Lysgaard (1955) is the most commonly used theory when explaining readjustment to a new culture.



**Figure 1.** *U-Curve Theory of Adjustment*

### **Re-acculturation and difficulties**

Acculturation is a process involving two or more groups of cultures, with consequences for both (Berry, 2001). Kim (1998) defines acculturation as “the common adaptive experiences of individuals who are born and raised in one cultural or subcultural environment and have

relocated to a new and different one for an extended length of time.” Berry and Kim (1988) introduced four acculturation strategies, which sojourners go through: integration, separation, assimilation and marginalization. To explain this in detail, individuals who value both cultural maintenance and intergroup relations are seen to be included within the integration strategy. Those who support cultural maintenance but do not value intergroup relations adopt a separation strategy. In contrast, those who are relatively unconcerned with cultural maintenance undergo the assimilation strategy. Finally, individuals who value neither cultural maintenance nor intergroup relations are perceived as going through the marginalization strategy. These strategies were found to relate to other features of acculturation process such as education, socioeconomic status, friendship patterns, and language usage (Berry et al., 1989).

Although Berry presented the concept of acculturation and acculturative stress at 1990, the concept of acculturation developed over time. Graves (1967) extended and proposed the concept of psychological acculturation, which is the psychological and behavioral changes than an individual experiences as a result of sustained contact with members of other cultural groups. Additionally, Ward and his colleagues linked cultural identity and intergroup relations to sociocultural adaptation problems (Ward & Kennedy, 1994). While

assimilating into an unfamiliar cultural background, learning the set of unfamiliar norms is a life-long process. Yet, when one learns the new culture during childhood, or in particular adolescence, and returns to the mother country, the process of acculturation becomes far more complex (Sasagawa et al., 2006; Takada, 1999). As Korea tends to have a higher collectivistic value while Western countries, such as Australia and the United States tends to have a higher individualistic values, Korean international students experience acculturation as they absorb both cultures while they study abroad at these English-speaking countries. During this process, they are in 'culture shock,' included to the process of acculturation to mention individual's anxiety and frustration when they first experience a completely new cultural or social environment (Oberg, 1960). Gaw (2000) defined culture shock as an emotional reaction towards the loss of the fortifier in which helps one to appreciate their own unique culture. In other words, by losing the fortifier, which reminds the international students to appreciate their home culture, international students are capable to adjust to the new host country's cultural or social environments as they go through acculturation.

### **Returnees' readjustment**

Unlike the past, when many international students studied

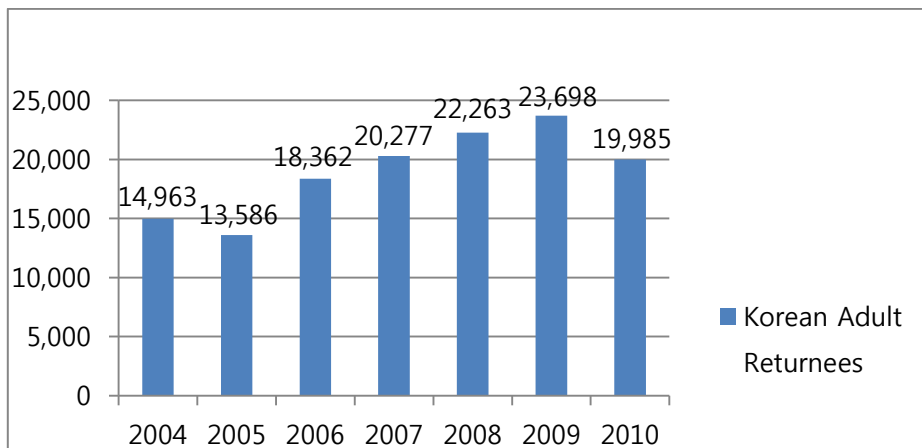
abroad in order to settle down in the host country, 47.8% of the international students nowadays are willing to come back to Korea after they complete their studies and these numbers are increasing continuously. According to the Korean Educational Development Institute (2012), there has been an increase of elementary, middle and high school returnees since 2006. <Table 1> presents the population of Korean returnees increased by 18,362 at 2006, 20,277 at 2007, 22,263 at 2008 and 23,698 at 2009. This may be influenced by the ‘glass-ceiling,’ due to the global financial crisis and the increase of overseas recruitment in companies (Dongah Ilbo, 2013).

As mentioned above, these international students were ‘pushed’ overseas to study abroad during their adolescence, which is known to be a critical time period for development. As they go through acculturation, international students are greatly influenced by the host country’s social and cultural norms. With a strange mix of East and West, these returnees look Korean from the outside but have a mind of a foreigner and speak better English. Therefore, they are considered to have a unique characteristic and viewed to be ‘different’ than those who grew up in Korea. Nagao (1998) claims returnees to have a new and unique identity as they do not belong to either groups of the host country or the home country. The Korean society calls them the ‘*salmon group (yun-uh jok)*’ while the Japanese society commonly calls

them '*kikokushijo (returnees)*' (JTBC, 2014; Kanno, 2000<sup>a</sup>).

Although the '*salmon group*' and '*kikokushijo*' resonate with the other terms such as Third Culture Kidss or Global Nomads, they are differentiated by the pressure placed by the home country's society to conform and its tendency to discriminate against anything or anyone that is different (Fukuoka, 2000; Sugimoto, 1997; Weiner, 1997;). In spite, returnees are no longer considered to have 'problems' but viewed to have unfair advantages (Goodman, 1990). For this reason, although there were a large amount of conducted studies about returnees in the 1970s and 1980s, few have been conducted in the 2000s.

**Table 1** *Present situations of Korean adult returnees*



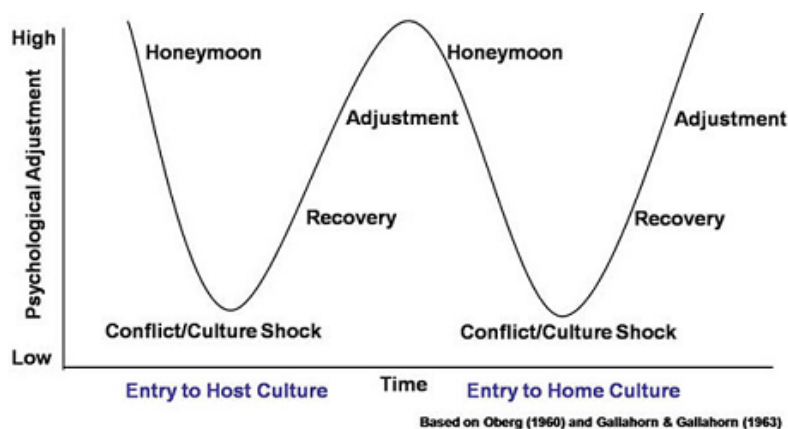
**Pull Factors to Return to Korea** Although there are international students who wish to get employed overseas at the host country, there has been an increase in returnees repatriating back to Korea. There are various reasons for their decisions to re-migrate to

Korea, indicated by previous studies: the most well-known predictors for this phenomenon are (1) family reunification, (2) wanting to find a spouse, (3) better chance for employment or business and (4) for personal relationships (Chaban et al., 2011; Chiang, 2004; Chiang & Liao, 2008). Studies conducted by Chiang and Liao (2008) confirmed the young Taiwanese migrant did not even try to look for work to reunite with their families and to get married. Due to their preference to marry someone with similar background or experiences, communicate with the same language and a similar culture, these migrants decided to return to their home country. Ip (2006) also agrees the employment status works as a social indicator for parachute returnees to repatriate to their home country.

### **Re-Acculturation · Readjustment**

As returnees repatriate to their home country, they are faced to experience re-entry culture shock during their re-acculturation to the Korean society. Re-entry culture shock is the psychological and social difficulties which returnees, who went through acculturation in the host country, re-experience as they return to their home country. Previous studies mention returnees go through more difficulties than those who sojourn in the host country. These difficulties include culture identity, social loss, depression, anger, anxiety, fear, alienation, refusal, social

chaos and other internal problems. Returnees experience these difficulties during the process of re-acculturation, which Onwumechili et al. (2003) defines as ‘an attempt to readjust upon re-entry to the homeland.’ The most representative theory for the returnees’ adjustment to their home country is the “W-curve Adjustment Theory”, which was developed from the U-curve theory of adjustment by Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963). After going through the U-curve adjustment, the W-Curve <Figure 2> continues to go through the Honeymoon stage, Culture Shock Stage, Recovery Stage and finally the Adjustment stage.



**Figure 2** *W-Curve adjustment theory*

However, although previous studies show the difficulties which returnees experience, Kanno (2000) claims they no longer suffer the educational and psychological difficulties they did a decade ago. For this reason, Japanese returnees are now emerging as the new elite of the Japanese society. Despite of this new status, which Japanese returnees



acquired, there are a few recent studies based on returnee adjustment and this is clearly not enough. Returnees continuously face various adjustment issues which are new and unique to today's circumstances. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development in Korea (2007) call the Korean returnees as the '*salmon group (yun-uh jok)*,' yet this defines young adults in their twenties or thirties who left home to become independent from their parents but return to their parents' house like salmons due to economic recession, rent and high living expenses. The adult returnees, who are studied in this research, do not apply to this definition however there is no exact term to call them. As for this, this study will call these adult returnees as 'returnees' and especially focus on those who received education in English-speaking countries. Due to the lack of conducted studies about Korean returnees, especially on their life satisfaction in Korea after their repatriation, the current study aims to investigate the challenges and difficulties which Korean returnees experienced during their process of readjustment to Korea and their overall life satisfaction in Korea.

**Ideological Orientation** Culture may be defined as “the way of life of people, the sum of their learned behavior, patterns, attitudes and material things” (Hall, 1990). Hence, culture is considered to be a very influential factor to all aspects of daily life, as it shapes family interaction, community settings, values, beliefs and social ideals (Berk,

2008; Hofstede, 1980). It can independently influence one's thoughts, belief, action and even attitude either directly through socialization with an individual within a culture or indirectly as one learns the language of a culture. Culture, in which individuals are raised, influence the way individuals are socialized in terms of individualistic and collectivistic tendencies. As culture is a broad concept and acts as the main variable that shapes individual and group attitudes, values, trends and behaviors, the construct of individualism and collectivism has received much empirical attention (Yetim, 2003). Individualism and collectivism is the major dimension of cultural variability to explain similarities and differences in behavior, yet it is difficult to categorize any culture is one or the other (Ghosh, 2012; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Singelis, et al., 1995). Individualism and collectivism exist in all cultures, but only one pattern tends to be predominant, so members from either culture can learn and acquire views of the other culture (Kaitcibasi, 2005; Smetana, 2002; Triandis, 1995; Weisner, 2002).

**Individualism-Collectivism    Value    Orientation    Value**  
 orientation is the hard core of culture as it motivates and regulates the action of people. It also serves as guiding principles in people's lives as value works as a criterion when judging and justifying the actions or social phenomenon; and evaluating other people and events (Ghosh, 2012; Rokeach, 1973; Wok, et al., 2001). The incompatibility in value

systems, that distinguishes the cultures of individualism and collectivism, are found not only in the social conducts but also in different patterns of self-understanding that are observed in individuals living within these cultures.

The cross-cultural psychology research has identified individualism and collectivism as two distinguishing features of human societies or cultures (Berry, 2001; Hofstede, 1983). In individualistic societies, people think of themselves as independent separate entities and are largely concerned with their own personal needs. For this reason, one in which the goals and needs of the individual take precedence over in-groups. Here, in-groups are ‘groups of people about whose welfare one is concerned, with whom one is willing to cooperate without demanding equitable returns, and separation from whom leads to discomfort or even pain,’(Triandis, 1995) including extended family, community, work organizations. People from individualistic societies tend to assume responsibility for themselves and their immediate family only. Most Western cultures are known to be individualistic societies, as they value personal autonomy, uniqueness and independence.

In the other hand, people in collectivistic societies define themselves as part of a group and stress group over individual goals. They view personal goals and needs as subordinate to the goals and

needs of these in-groups. They tend to belong to in-groups that look after them in exchange for the individuals' loyalty (Triandis, 1995). Most Eastern cultures are known to be collectivistic societies, as they value person-other relatedness or interdependence and person as being part of a collective. For example, East Asian countries, including Korea, hold Confucian value orientation (Cha, 1994; Park & Shin, 2006). In the Confucianism society, the ideal self is defined and established in terms of one's relationship to other people – in other words group-seeking rather than self-seeking. It also emphasizes personal virtues rather than individual rights.

Although individualism and collectivism seem to have opposite value orientations, it is important to acknowledge that individualistic and collectivistic orientations are blurred and coexist, due to globalization, internationalization, Internet and the spread of Western culture. As a result of this, the current study aims to investigate the cultural differences in which returnees experienced difficulties in.

**Self-Identity** Berry and Kim (1988) suggested one of the primary dimensions of acculturation is the maintenance of original cultural identity. The term self-identity was first used and systemized by one of the most important neo-Freudians, Erikson (1968). Erikson extended Freud's psychoanalytic theory by claiming an individual goes through 8 stages of psychosocial development and describes the impact

of social experience across the whole lifespan, in order to claim identity. These previous studies suggested that people who form strong personal identities during adolescence are better capable of forming intimate relationships during early adulthood. However, Erikson mentioned that even adults continue to ask themselves questions about who they are and how they fit into the world around them as “a sense of identity is never gained nor maintained once and for all... it is constantly lost and regained” (Erikson, 1959, p118).

Erikson mentioned establishing identity is one of the most important tasks for adolescents to acquire. Self-identity is especially important for returnees, because identity is known to act as a “secure foundation” and a “buffer against psychological stress” for returnees, as it helps one to relate to the native ethnic group and to other relevant ethnic groups (Phinney, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Meanwhile, young people in industrialized or postindustrial societies now stay in school longer, marry later, and have their first child later when compared to the past (Arnett, 2000; White, 2003). Because marriage and parenthood is delayed until the mid or late twenties for most people, adulthood is gradually delayed which instigates these people to explore more on their identity. For this reason, the significance of *emerging adulthood*, is increasing as identity confusion has been discovered during this time period (Schwartz et al., 2009). These emerging adults

explore more on their identity in three main areas: love, work and world view. Meanwhile, the development of identity is shaped by macro-level factors such as culture, social and cultural environment (Schwartz et al., 2013; Taylor & Oskay, 1995). However, for individuals who grow up in multi-cultures, this can be a complicated struggle, as they often feel pressured to choose one ethnicity over the other and feel guilty about their choice (Poston, 1990). Those who return from two different cultures (individualist-collectivist) tend to feel this struggle because individualistic societies value an *independent self*, which emphasizes personal exploration, discovery, achievement and individual and individual choice in relationships. On the other hand, collectivistic societies value an *interdependent self*, which stresses social harmony, obligations, responsibility to others, and collaborative endeavors (Greenfield et al., 2003; Keller, 2003). For this reason, returnees have a similar prototypical image of the Japanese returnee participants from the study conducted by Kanno (2000)<sup>a</sup>. Kanno interviewed four kikokushijo, also known as Japanese returnees, who were former participants in order to include as many different kikokushijo experiences as possible. Here, the participants came to an agreement that the prototypical image of a kikokushijo is someone who is a strange mix of East and West, Japanese on the outside and a foreigner on the inside, who speaks better English than Japanese. This

bicultural-self made it difficult for them to fit comfortably and naturally in any one society (Kanno, 2000)<sup>a,b</sup>. Due to the lack of studies related to adult returnees' formation of self-identity after emerging adulthood, the current study aims to investigate the effects of self-identity on returnees.

**Self-Expression** Ekman (1972) insisted people control their feelings by using various methods such as minimizing, exaggerating or hiding their feelings. Ekman's (1972) findings show those who are unable to express their feelings may bring bad results in social interactions. Self-expression is a very important quality as it can become a powerful sign of individual freedom, because self-expression is also said to be the evidence of the self (Hawkins, 2002). As individuals express their inner thoughts and feelings, they are capable to realize their individuality. This is because the significance of self-expression depends on the concept of the self, because the act of self-expression involves projecting one's own thoughts and ideas into the world (Kim & Sherman, 2007). Kim and Sherman (2007) stated the United States value self-expression, which is not privileged in East Asia. In East Asia, people who do not express their feelings have a better evaluation and receive more attention in social situations. This is due to the cultural views of an individual because the collectivistic society stress social and relational concepts such as belongingness, kinship, hierarchy, loyalty, honor, respect, politeness, and social obligation

whereas the individualistic society maintains a prevalent view of self as the independent self and choice.

However, previous studies mention self-expression is related to life satisfaction and happiness. Lee and Hyun (2008) stated those who are aware of their feelings are psychologically healthy and have a positive point of view, which results higher life satisfaction. Findings from other studies claimed individuals who had difficulties expressing their inner thoughts and opinions had a high tendency to evaluate themselves negatively, experience high anxiety and inferiority, worried they might not be able to receive emotional supports from others and went through social maladjustment (Culkin & Perrotto, 1985; Kirschner & Galssi, 1983). For such reasons, self-expression can be viewed as a significant factor for returnees' life satisfaction during readjustment.

**Self confidence in English** According to previous studies about the relationship between language and cross-cultural adjustment, results demonstrated effective intercultural communication works as a protective factor and instigates cultural adjustment and one's psychological stability (Dao et al., 2007; Sumer et al., 2008; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Specifically, cognitive (linguistic ability), emotional (linguistic confidence) and motivational (preference) factors, related to second language learning and usage, can influence one's psychological and sociocultural adjustment during the process of acculturation (Wang,



2009).

Various studies on international students' cross-cultural adjustment to the host country mentioned that the actual linguistic ability is a significant factor to explain the difficulties of cross-cultural adjustment, and international students saw their English ability to act as a major influence towards their stay in the United States (Church, 1982; Kagan & Cohen, 1990; Leong & Chou, 2002; Otsu, 2008; Yang & Clum, 1995). Although TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is used to measure English fluency, findings from Jochems et al. (1996) claimed TOEFL is insufficient in order to predict international students' adjustment. For this reason, recent studies are turning their attention towards language self confidence rather than linguistic ability.

Maintaining confidence in using the host country's language is believed to be a significant predictor during the international students' process of acculturation. Such language confidence is defined by Noels, Pon and Clement (1996) as 'self-perceptions of communicative competence and concomitant low levels of anxiety in using the second language, leads to increased usage of, and communicative competence in, the second language.' It is well-known that effective intercultural communication can facilitate an individuals' well-being during acculturation. Although fluent intercultural communication is important, results from previous studies mention language confidence is argued to

be a more vital predictor of acculturative outcomes than actual linguistic competence. In other words, maintaining high self-confidence and comfort in the usage of the second language relates to a lower sense of stress and higher sense of personal control in carrying out daily tasks at the host country for international students (Noels & Clement, 1996).

According to Rogers (1998), the world's extension of English usage, due to internationalization and globalization, created English divides which even exist within academic fields. For this reason, people from countries, where the mother language is not English, are required to learn more than one language. Rogers (1998) mentioned a similar phenomenon in a university at Istanbul, Turkey where college students belittling their mother language in order to acquire business English abilities. This phenomenon partially corresponds to the Korean society as the Korean society places English as a 'priority' to acquire (Noh, 2009). The findings of Kanno (2010) attested Japanese returnees believed they were recognized throughout their English proficiency. Proficiency is a relative thing, and in the case of Japanese returnees, their English sounds exceptionally good when compared to those who have never lived abroad. This made the Japanese returnees feel their English competence is the uniqueness and phenomenon of their identity maintenance.

Previous studies paid more attention to international students' English abilities as they were adjusting to the United States and the English divide which is present in Korean corporations. Due to the lack of conducted studies related to the relationship between self confidence in English and the Korean society, the current study aims to find strength and difficulties which returnees feel towards their confidence in English.

**Interpersonal Communication** Through languages, people communicate with one another, think for others and themselves, and feel emotions. Meanwhile, language is not the only means of communication; it may be supported by gestures, facial expressions or other means of non-verbal communication (Nishida, 1985). Communication plays an important role for both host and home country's cultural adaptation in a most direct and significant way. Previous studies emphasize the importance of communication when adjusting to the host or home country. Kim (1998) presented sojourners successfully adapt to the host country as they go through communication adjustment by switching their communication patterns towards the host country. Martin and Harrell (1996) extended Kim's model and proclaimed when people return to their native countries, they realize they have changed through the interactions with others in their home culture and experience 'reverse culture shock'. In order to

cope with the changes in interpersonal communication, they readjust to the home country's communication styles, yet this adjustment to interaction is recognized as the most difficult dimension (Chaban et al., 2011). Returnees who return to East Asian cultures, especially those from Western cultures, face great cultural differences as they go through communication readjustment. This is due to the direct effect in which individualism and collectivism has on communication styles (Gudykunst et al., 1996).

Western cultures, which are individualistic societies, have a preference for direct communication styles in contrast to East Asian cultures, which are collectivistic societies, for indirect forms (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1996). Takeuchi et al.'s (2001) findings reinforce in high-context collectivistic cultures, avoiding conflicts and saving the other person's face is fundamental to communication. Returnees, who are more exposed to the Western culture, acquired more direct communication styles during cultural adaptation. For this reason, like Kobayashi's (1983) research on Japanese returnees, the stereotypical image of returnees suggest they keep these communication styles even when they switch back to Korean. However, Takeuchi et al.'s (2001) results demonstrated that Japanese returnees, who were from the United States, followed the Japanese collectivistic norms and favor Japanese standards. The results suggested Japanese were more sensitive about

showing negative nonverbal expressions towards higher status people than Americans.

Meanwhile, there were no previous studies available which specifically investigated communication styles of returnees in Korea. As a result of this the current study aims to investigate the difficulties which returnees experience through interpersonal communication during their readjustment in Korea.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### **Research Questions**

The present study investigates the challenges and difficulties which successively readjusted Korean returnees experienced during their process of readjustment to Korea. The following questions guided this study:

1. What stereotypes or difficulties did the returnee participants encounter as they successively readjusted to the Korean society?
2. What kind of cultural differences did they face?
3. How do the returnees define themselves?

## IV. METHODS

### **Overview**

The purpose of this narrative study was to examine the stories and transitions of Korean returnees who studied overseas in the United States and successively readjusted to their workplaces. As the study examines the challenges and obstacles in which Korean returnees faced during their re-entry to Korea, the goal of the study is to develop an in-depth understanding of these challenges and difficulties as they successively readjusted back to Korea. In this study, narrative analysis and personal experiences were used to collect Korean returnees' experiences and stories to understand the challenges and obstacles, in which returnees experienced as they successively readjusted to their work environment. This chapter contains a description of the participants and the methodology for this study. Additionally, the data analysis will be described.

### **Researcher's Perspective**

I am a female from Korea who was raised in a well-educated family where education is believed to be one of the most important aspects in one's life. I lived and attended school in the United States and United Kingdom as my father was studying business strategy and management. When he completed his study, our family returned to

Korea as I attended an international school in Korea. By the age of 14 years old, I started to study abroad in the United States, received my bachelor's degree and returned to Korea in 2011. As I observed other repatriated international students, they experienced reverse culture shock, faced barriers and stereotypes by others and encountered resistance within themselves and others. After observing and experiencing these experiences, I asked myself how returnees could readjust to their home country effectively and successfully to everyone's benefit.

As marriage and parenthood are delayed nowadays, it is hard to define adults in their middle or late twenties either adolescence or young adulthood as they are empirically distinct from them both. Arnett (2000) proposes a time period called *emerging adulthood*, which is a period of the life course that is culturally constructed, not universal and immutable. As most of the returnees repatriate back to Korea during their mid or late twenties, as an emerging adult, they continuously explore a variety of possible directions of their life and their own identity in the areas of love, work and worldviews (Arnett, 2000).

As the returnee phenomenon is a recent issue in Korea, there is little data about the repatriates who are in between the emerging adulthood. This study investigates narratives of returnees in hope to identify the challenges and difficulties which returnees who readjusted

successfully experienced in order to eliminate the stereotypes in which returnees are viewed as; and to eliminate reverse culture shock for future returnees.

## **Participants**

The goal of qualitative research is to enrich and understand “the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants” (Merriam, 2002). As purposeful sampling helps to achieve representation of the individuals and their activities that were particularly relevant to the research (Gibson & Brown, 2009), the participants were selected by purposeful sampling in order to emphasize the in-depth understanding of the participants’ readjustment experiences.

Ten Korean returnees (5 male, 5 female) from the United States, who successively readjusted back to Korea and were willing to talk about their experiences participated in this study. They at least attended an international school or high school in the United States, repatriated back to Korea after they completed their studies and were attending graduate school or employed and worked as a member of the Korean society for at least one year. These participants ranged from 24 to 26 years old.

Between September and October 2013, 10 in-depth interviews, each lasting approximately an hour and 30 minutes, were conducted.



The interviews were semi-structured, conducted in person or by telephone, recorded and fully transcribed, in an average of 6.5 pages. There were no refusals amongst the participants in the study, reflecting willingness to talk about their readjustment experiences in Korea (Table 2). Most of the interviewees started their study abroad during their high school years. Among these interviewees, one studied abroad for 4 years, two for 6 years, one for 7 years, two for 8 years, one for 9 years, one for 10 years, one for 11 years and one for 12 years. Three interviewees were employed in Korea for 1 year, two for less than 2 years, four for less than 3 years and one for less than 4 years. Their occupations, though diverse, are mainly professionals, such as working at departments of large customer sales, sales and services, management, clinical research assistant, and content strategy; graduate students and business managers.

**Table 2.1** Descriptive Statistics for Participants

ID No	Gender	Age	SES	Attended schools overseas	Years of study abroad	Residence status during study abroad	Years of employment in Korea	Occupation	Parents' occupation	
1	Female	24	Upper-Middle Class	High school (public), University (state)	6	Alone	Less than 2	Large Customer Sales Department	Father	Researcher
									Mother	Teacher
2	Female	26	Upper-Middle Class	International school (elementary, middle), High school (public), University (private)	7	Alone	Less than 3	Business Manager	Father	Researcher
									Mother	Designer
3	Female	25	Upper-Middle Class	Elementary, High school (private), University (state)	8	Alone	Less than 3	Graduate student	Father	Self-employed
									Mother	Self-employed
4	Female	26	Upper-Middle Class	High school (private), University (state)	10	Alone	1	Graduate student	Father	Doctor
									Mother	Housewife
5	Female	25	Upper-Middle Class	Middle (private), High school (public), University (state)	11	With family: 6 Alone: 5	Less than 3	Clinical Research Assistant	Father	Self-employed
									Mother	Housewife

**Table 2.2** Descriptive Statistics for Participants

ID No	Gender	Age	SES	Attended schools overseas	Years of study abroad	Residence status during study abroad	Years of employment in Korea	Occupation	Parents' occupation	
6	Male	26	Upper-Middle Class	International school (elementary, middle, high), University (state)	4	Alone: 4	Less than 4	Business Manager	Father	Self-Employed
									Mother	Housewife
7	Male	26	Upper-Middle Class	High school (private), University (state)	6	With family: 2 Alone: 4	1	Management Department	Father	Chemical Engineer
									Mother	Housewife
8	Male	26	Upper-Middle Class	High school (public), University (state)	8	With family: 4 Alone: 4	Less than 3	Graduate student	Father	Self-employed
									Mother	Housewife
9	Male	26	Upper-Middle Class	High school (public), University (state)	10	Alone	1	Sales and Services Department	Father	Self-employed
									Mother	Housewife
10	Male	26	Upper-Middle Class	Elementary, high school (private), University (state)	12	With family: 4 Alone: 8	Less than 2	Content Strategy Department	Father	Executive
									Mother	Housewife

## Measures

Qualitative interview questions were generated primarily from a preliminary pilot study with a group of Korean returnees, who are currently participating in the Korean society. By sharing the interview protocol with two Korean returnees and academic thesis director, the interview questions were verified whether the interview questions could identify the challenges and difficulties which returnees experienced during their process of readjustment. The academic thesis director reviewed the interview questions and provided some general opinions and feedback on the questions (e.g., editing questions such as wording, ordering, and adding, additional questions). The interview included semi-structured open-ended questions that allowed the researcher to flexibly follow the lead of participants, and would sometimes ask for more elaboration and definition. By using ‘narrative inquiry’ (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), the researcher could inquire into people’s experiences and the ways in which they make sense of them. Carole Conle(1995) stated these ‘stories of experience’ hold a key to a better understanding of social phenomena. Each interview was voice-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed by open-coding methods. Theoretically, this study will add to the corpus of studies about Korean returnees readjusting back to their mother country.

## **Procedure**

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to 5 returnees, who were recruited through purposeful sampling and willing to participate, prior to the main study. This study was conducted to investigate the common difficulties experienced by the returnees in Korea. By categorizing these difficulties, the researcher developed a specific set of questions which would expand and clarify the participants' experiences. These specific set of questions were reviewed by the academic thesis director. The pilot study was proceeded in quiet places, where interviewees felt comfortable and to voice-record the interview. Before the main study, the researcher was concerned whether the interview questions were clear and easy to understand, so the pilot study was conducted in September 2013. By conducting the pilot study, any unclear and unnecessary interview questions were clarified and eliminated.

### **Main Study**

Data was collected using in-depth interviews from September 2013 to October 2013. In order to obtain the Korean returnees' perspectives on their overall life satisfaction in Korea, one-on-one interviews were conducted according to the standardized open-ended format (Patton, 1990). Interview topics were focused by the specific set of questions which were constructed and reviewed during the pilot

study, as well as follow-up questions for the purposes of clarifying and probing the participants' answers. The specific set of required questions allows efficient use of the interview time.

Interviews lasted approximately an hour and 30 minutes on average and were administered to the participants at a convenient location. In cases, when the participants were unable to meet in person, interviews were conducted via phone. Prior to the beginning of the interview, participants were given an informed consent form, along with a brief introduction and explanation of the interview. Then, the participants were asked to sign the informed consent form, acknowledging their willingness to participate in the study. Following this, their permission was asked to voice-record the interview, in order to secure the collected data's reliability. For the interviews conducted via phone, the informed consent form, along with a brief introduction and explanation of the interview, was sent through email prior to the interview. After reading the consent form, the participants signed it and sent a scanned pdf file of the signed informed consent form back to the researcher. The researcher administered all of the interviews, thereby reducing variability that can occur with multiple interviewers. Furthermore during the interview, the researcher took memos in order to record general impressions and observations of the returnees, to include while transcribing the voice-recorded interviews. The voice-

recorded interviews were assigned ID numbers, in order to maintain confidentiality. A total of 10 returnees (5 male, 5 female) participated in the study. Among these interviewees, one studied abroad for 4 years, two for 6 years, one for 7 years, two for 8 years, two for 10 years, one for 11 years and one for 12 years. Three were employed in Korea for 1 year, two for less than 2 years, four for less than 3 years and one for less than 4 years.

### **Data Analysis**

A content and thematic analysis was followed through the collected in-depth interview data. The specific analysis process was carried on by the following steps:

First stage: All collected data, which were mostly recorded in English and partially in Korean, was transcribed for the follow-up analysis.

Second stage: The transcribed contents were encoded by identifying concepts in the data and clarifying their dimensions and properties. During this step, Korean comments were translated into English. In this process, the researcher repeatedly read the transcribed data and assigned a category term, which sticks to the original meaning of the participants.

Third stage: As the last stage of the analysis process, open coding was used to group words, phrases, or sentences into concepts

(Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which were later grouped into categories.

**Table 3** *Themes for Interviews*

Categories of Interview	Interview Themes
Demographic Information	Age, Daily life cycle, Study abroad period, Adjustment during study abroad, Age starting study abroad, Residential status
Ideological Orientation Individualism-Collectivism	Independence, Adjustment in United States and Korea
English ability	Linguistic expectations, Linguistic advantages
Self-Expressiveness	Participation in group meetings, Expressing own opinion
Self-Identity	Feeling lost or marginalized, Defining one's identity
Interpersonal Communication	Linguistic difficulties back in Korea: traditional idioms, Korean-Chinese words, speaking, writing



## **V. RESULTS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to examine the stories of Korean returnees who sojourned in the United States to further their education and returned to Korea. The goal was to develop an in-depth understanding of the Korean returnees who successively readjusted to the Korean society. To accomplish this purpose, ten Korean returnees participated in the in-depth interview. Content and thematic analyses were used to identify, analyze and report themes. The findings address the common stereotypes and difficulties, which the Korean returnees experienced and their life satisfaction in Korea after successively readjusting to the Korean society. By coding the interviews, six initial major themes were constructed: (a) boundary ambivalence between ideological orientations, (b) stereotypes on returnees, (c) no hesitation when expressing their opinions, (d) high self confidence in English: strength and stress, (e) interpersonal communication difficulties, and (f) life satisfaction in Korea. Here, ideological orientation and life satisfaction was split into subthemes as the data contained similar but different information within the theme. Each theme and sub-theme is explained below.

## **Boundary Ambivalence of Ideological Orientations**

Ideological orientation is an important variable to influence one's behaviors. An ideological orientation is individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995). Collectivism is especially seen as a traditional characteristic of the Confucianism society. Here, Confucianism is a realistic belief and life philosophy as it highlights the importance of community spirit, hierarchy and seniority. For this reason, there is a tendency to respect the elders and follow their seniors' steps or advices in their workplace. During the process of readjustment, returnees encounter these difficulties, such as 'reverse cultural shock', as they re-adopt to the changes in the home culture that occurred during sojourn (Adler, 1981; Chaban et al., 2011; Chiang & Liao, 2008; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Takeuchi et al., 2001). One of the hypotheses was experiencing confusion in ideological orientation tendencies. This was noticed in the interview data, which indicated the challenges and obstacles experienced by the returnees during readjustment. These challenges and obstacles could be categorized into two sub-themes during the analysis of the interviews. Participant 6, who is more familiar to the Western culture because he was more exposed to the Western culture by living overseas with his family since young age and graduated from an international school in Korea, could significantly identify the cultural differences he experienced.

One of the significant cultural differences I noticed was the values. What can I say... the United States is much more... it requires much more independence, while Korea is more like the “we-culture”. I mean “we-culture” as in it works as a community not individually. So I think the United States is much more likely to be centered on individualism while Korea is centered on collectivism. (Participant 6)

Participant 4, who is currently a graduate student in Korea, indicated the cultural differences she experienced. By recalling her work experiences at her past workplace, which was an English private educational institute, she recognized the following:

I can say the United States has a strong tendency of individualism while Korea has a strong tendency of collectivism. In the United States, it is pretty common to see people eating by themselves or even while they’re walking, but if you do that in Korea, they give you this look. As if I have no friends to eat with. I really don’t need someone in front of me to eat with. I can eat by myself. But I guess it’s one of the cultural differences between the United States and Korea. (Participant 4)

In short, results of the interviews suggest that most of the participants

found the Korean ideological orientation different from the United States. The participants came to a concordance in which they believed Korea was more likely to be a collectivistic society, which emphasized 'we' than 'me'.

### **Difficulties in Understanding Hierarchy and Seniority**

Many returnees, who participated in the interview, replied they noticed Confucianism was deeply rooted into the Korean society. Specifically, they mentioned they believe hierarchy and seniority in vertical human relationship plays a key role in the corporates in Korea. As a result of this, returnees believed control and obedience were required to maintain the harmony within the well-organized corporates. Many of the participants considered this to be one of the factors which they had a hard time to adjust. Participant 5 and participant 10 especially emphasized the need of getting used to the hierarchy and seniority.

Hierarchy and seniority plays a key role in the corporate in Korea. I think it is sometimes even more important than professionalism and work experience. No matter how experienced or professional you are, if you can't make harmony within the corporate... It's no use. (Participant 5)

The United States has a very small interval between one's senior and junior. But in Korea's case, the respect and

courtesy is a MUST. There's this vertical relationship that is formed between a senior and junior and I think that interval is quite big in Korea. (Participant 10)

Both participants, who studied abroad for 11 and 12 years and worked for less than 2 years in their current occupation, realized hierarchy and seniority is very important in the Korean society. Participant 3, who studied abroad for 8 years by herself, previously worked at an English private educational institute and currently a graduate student in Korea, had a similar opinion. She stated:

I think the Korean society emphasizes harmony. At the same time, people want the control as well as being well-organized. To make this harmony work, I think hierarchy is very important in Korea. (Participant 3)

Although many scholars state that the boundaries between collectivistic and individualistic orientations are blurred and coexist (Kaitcibasi, 2005; Smetana, 2002; Triandis, 1995; Weisner, 2002), Triandis (1995) claims that individualism and collectivism may at times be inversely related, such that societies high in one tend to be low in the other. As East Asian cultures are based on Confucianism, which advances collectivist goals, emphasizes hard work and achievement (Tamis-Lemonda et al., 2008), Park and Shin (2006) identifies the

Korean society to be deeply rooted with principles of Confucian moral philosophy including hierarchy and seniority.

This Confucian moral tradition presented basic human relations are fundamentally hierarchical including respect and obligation (Cha, 1994; Park & Shin, 2006), and promote more relatedness and interdependence (Grotevant, 1998). In other words, young people are expected to respect and obey their elders or seniors, by following the given instructions at any occasion. Although returnees found these Korean cultural norms in which the participants lived by before studying abroad somewhat familiar, they also found certain norms to be frustrating. Participants who were exposed to Western cultures, which encourage individuals to be independent, autonomous and to have self-esteem (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007), especially found this social hierarchy a psychological burden creating difficulties to adjust. Similar findings were presented in Chiang and Liao's study (2008), which mentioned young Taiwanese returnees, who came back from Australia, could not accept that 'the boss is always right'. With these results, it can be hypothesized that the participants, who were influenced by the Western culture, experience confusion due to this cultural difference. However, as Triandis (1994) and Yetim (2002) results states, individualists pay more attention to their own independency and happiness because the concept of independence is emphasized more

than in a collectivistic culture. For this reason, it can be assumed that returnees, who were exposed to the individualistic culture, slowly adjusted to the Korean society as they started to understand the system and blended into their surroundings, in order to obtain their happiness.

### **Lack of privacy and priorities on individual's private life**

Another different cultural norm between the United States and Korea, which the participants felt frustrating, was the lack of priorities on individual's private life. The participants mentioned the United States, which has a stronger individualism ideology, emphasizes the protection on individuals' private lives and considers the balance between work and life as an important factor. Meanwhile, the participants believed these were not considered to be important whereas the priorities in Korea are the team or group within the corporate. Additionally, they mentioned that "Koreans usually care more about what others think and how they are perceived to others" (Participant 9). Here, many of the participants found the interest and attention to be uncomfortable and missed the privacy they once had in the United States. Participant 4 and participant 9, who both studied abroad by themselves during their high school and college years for 10 years, stated:

When you walk on the street, people really don't know what you are wearing or what you are doing in the States. In Korea, everyone is incredibly quick and good at knowing how others

dress like. I think that one difference explains everything. There's less privacy and individualism here when compared to the States. (Participant 4)

People in the United States usually do not care about what others think or do as long as they don't harm others. I think Koreans usually care more about what others think and how they are perceived to others. This makes me to watch my words and actions, so it tires me out sometimes. (Participant 9)

Participant 4 and participant 9 presented their frustration on lack of privacy and priorities on their private lives by stating they have to watch their words, actions and appearances. As these two participants were accustomed to the culture of the United States for 10 years, they faced this readjustment challenges. Participant 2, who attended an international school from elementary and part of middle school, and started to study abroad alone during her high school and college years, stated:

I consider Korea to be a very Collectivism country. When I attended middle school in Korea, I used to go to the restroom with my friends. But as I started to live in the States, I think I became more independent. You know.. the United States considers each person's individuality very important. But



Korea is not like that. If your senior doesn't go home, you can't. It's like.. systemized like this ever since elementary school. (Participant 2)

Particularly, participant 2 compared her experiences in a Korean middle school, which she attended for one year, to her study abroad experiences. By experiencing the Korean middle school education system briefly, she was able identify the differences between both cultures. Additionally, the participants noticed their priorities could no longer be focused on their private lives but on their assigned team or group. Participant 7, who works in a management department, expressed his frustration as he switched his priorities to his work rather than his private life. He said:

In the United States, they give more priorities to their individual and private life. On the other hand, in Korea, their team or groups are their priorities. This also includes in workplaces too. It seems like Americans think their work or life should balance out and this is very important, but Koreans don't hesitate to work till late night at the cost of partially giving up their family, friends and personal life. (Participant 7)

As the participants sojourned in the United States during their

period of studying abroad, they were exposed to the American culture which is considered to be individualistic (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). According to Triandis et al. (1988), individualistic cultures emphasize the goals of the individual over group goals, and individuals tend to belong to in-groups that look after them in exchange for the individuals' loyalty. Here, in-groups are groups of people which one is concerned of their welfare and is willing to cooperate without demanding equitable returns, and separate them from those who lead to discomfort or pain (e.g., family, close friends). In other words, individualistic cultures tend to find more elements of the private self and less of the public or collective self. This differs from the collectivistic Korean society, where Confucianism is deeply rooted. Ahuvia (2002) claims collectivism as a social mechanism for organizing and enforcing group cooperation and revolves around face, honor, and public reputation. Here, the Confucian ideal person is not self-seeking, as individualistic cultures encourage, but group seeking (Park & Shin, 2006) and the harmony within relationship is a significant predictor of life satisfaction (Kwan et al., 1997). Although Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2008) stated the hierarchical relationships harmoniously coexist with individualistic goals, as behavioral differences are rooted in cultural differences, such as values or ways of thinking (Minoura, 1988), the participants still experienced confusion during their readjustment to their home-country,

as the Korean society tends to have higher collectivistic values. This result corresponds with previous findings, which stated returnees believe hierarchy, collectivism, and reputation were the difficulties they experienced (Gaw, 2000; Kim, 2001; Moriyoshi, 2001; Park, 2011; Stahl et al., 2009). Yet, as several studies suggest, in contrast to the stereotypical view of ‘outgoing, individualistic returnees’ from the United States, many returnees are more likely to be collectivistic (Kanno, 1996; Takeuchi, et al., 2001). For this reason, it can be hypothesized that the participants’ capability to successively readjust to Korea affects their life satisfaction in Korea.

### **Stereotypes on returnees: American or Korean**

Identity formation is the product of interactions among cultural factors, cognitive-developmental processes and social experiences (Whaley, 1993). Hence, individuals who lived in foreign countries with different cultural values are likely to experience self-identity risks. As Sussman (2000) claims cultural identity may provide insight into the repatriation problem and contribute to an emerging social psychology analysis of cultural transitions, self-identity functions as a very important factor for an individual’s social adjustment. In other words, individuals with well-developed self-identity are likely to adjust to their surroundings positively, while those who go through identity confusion are likely to experience difficulties during readjustment (Sussman,

2000; Whaley, 1993). The current study also presents a consistent condition. Participants, who sojourned in the United States during their adolescence, explored and affirmed their identity during their adolescence and continue this exploration during emerging adulthood. Although the development of identity is shaped by macro-level factors such as culture, social and cultural environment (Schwartz et al., 2013; Taylor & Oskay, 1995), the participants stated they did not feel lost or marginalized within their fellow colleagues, co-workers and surroundings and additionally identified themselves as Koreans. However, they indicated the stereotypes which fellow colleagues, co-workers and seniors had towards study abroad students and returnees. These included 'very American' (Participant 3), 'not used to Korean culture' (Participant 6), and 'more open-minded to everything' (Participant 9). Participants identified many people expected returnees to define themselves as American, yet all participants familiarized themselves as Korean. Especially, participant 4 elaborated her frustration about the stereotypes, which others seemed to have towards her:

I don't know why but many people expect me to be different, compared to them. However, I never felt lost or marginalized around my surrounding. I am definitely Korean, but with some Americanized ideas and thoughts. (Participant 4)

Although participant 4 studied abroad for 10 years during her high school and college years, she considered herself as a Korean with more Americanized ideas and thoughts. Participant 8, who studied abroad for 8 years in total – 4 years with family and 4 years by himself, agreed:

I've never felt lost among my surrounding. I consider myself Korean, because I have my precious Korean citizenship, lived with the Korean culture, Korean friends and Korean family members for my entire life even though I was in the United States for couple of years. (Participant 8)

Participant 8 stated he never felt lost among his surroundings at his previous workplace, at a Sales and Services department in a Korean corporation, and even now as a graduate student in Korea. He also mentioned completing his military services helped him feel more belonged to the Korean society, which participant 7 also agreed on. There were some cases where participants rarely felt marginalized around their surroundings. Participant 1, who studied abroad by herself for 6 years and currently works at a large customer sales department for less than 2 years, stated:

I rarely feel lost or marginalized around my surrounding. I spent much more time in Korea and I feel more comfortable speaking in Korean. I love Korea more. But I think a little part of me is Americanized. (Participant 1)

As participant 6 lived overseas with his family during his childhood and attended an international school in Korea, he agreed with participant 1.

He said:

I sometimes feel lost within my surroundings and I think it's the cultural difference. That's why I consider myself both Americanized and Koreanized. I lived in Korea for more than 20 years and I'm used to the Korean cultures. But on the other hand, I had American education since middle school, so I guess it's mixed in both. (Participant 6)

Although participant 6 mentioned he felt lost within his surroundings sometimes, he stated himself to have a hybrid-identity of both American and Korean. Self-identity is one of the most significant factors in explaining the adjustment of returnees, because those who are in the discrepancy between how they define themselves and how they are defined by others, result readjustment difficulties (Kanno, 1996; Moriyoshi, 2001; Sussman, 2000). Although the participants' identities were created as different cultural groups (United States and Korea) interact with each other, such as mixing of languages and cultural practices (Asher, 2008; Hutnyk, 2005; Pieterse, 2001), they maintain a strong sense of identifying themselves as a Korean. However, they also experience identity shifts at certain situations, due to their 'Americanized ideas and thoughts.' In fact, several studies suggest

despite of the stereotype of returnees from the United States to be 'outgoing and individualistic returnees,' it turned out that they are more likely to share collectivistic values (Kanno, 1996; Sasagawa et al., 2006; Takeuchi et al., 2001). With the support of previous results, it can be suggested that the participants' strong sense of identity instigated their smooth readjustment and increase of life satisfaction in Korea (Campbell, 1981; Diener, 1984; Diener & Diener, 1995; Judge et al., 2005; Leung & Leung, 1992; Morganti et al., 1988; Piccolo et al., 2005).

### **No hesitation when expressing their opinions**

One of the significant factors for positive adjustment is actively expressing one's opinions, as a healthy and stabilized self-ability is developed by self-expression. In other words, through self-expression, an individual can establish emotional balance, self-esteem, social adaptability and even life satisfaction. Kim and Sherman (2007) states, self-expression depends on the concept of self as self-expression involves projecting one's own thoughts and ideas in order to realize one's individuality. In the current study, participants referred that during group meetings at their workplaces, they would try to express their opinions or the questions they have. Many of the participants showed a high tendency to actively participate or at least try to give some input to the meetings if they are familiar with the agenda. Yet,

they also mentioned the frustration, as many people expected them to participate more in group meetings, due to the stereotypes they have towards study abroad returnees, especially when no one is participating or giving out their opinions. In spite of this frustration, many participants said they will express their ideas when they believe their opinions need to be heard. Five participants emphasized they were willing to speak up when needed without hesitation. Especially participant 1 believed she should not be ashamed of mistakes or misunderstanding and said:

If I am involved in and have full understanding about the agenda, I try to actively participate and give some input. Especially, when I have an opinion, I usually speak up without hesitation. There is a chance that I might be wrong, but I don't really care because I'm only just starting to learn and there is nothing to be ashamed about it. But it is quite awkward to be the only one speaking up. (Participant 1)

Participant 6, who is currently a business manager, agrees with participant 1 as he states it is important to speak up when needed, especially when the upper divisions are about to proceed the procedure in an inefficient way. He explained:

My co-workers might think I'm cocky because I tend to express my ideas and try to push it all the way when I think it



is right. I express more often than other co-workers, for example, when upper divisions do things in an inefficient way, I tend to suggest ideas to minimize the inefficiency. It is hard to say this to upper divisions, but if you can't express your idea because they're elders or upper divisions, it just blocks the room for improvement. (Participant 6)

Participant 7, who works in a management department, has a similar opinion as participant 6. He believes when the topic or procedure is going off track, it is important to indicate and fix it. He said:

After I deliver my message, I usually listen to what others have to say, because that's the way it goes around here. Yet, when I feel someone is just speaking up just to show off but getting it all wrong, I suddenly become active and try to fix it.

I personally prefer open debates. (Participant 7)

As participant 3 is currently a graduate student in Korea and well accustomed to open-discussion and debates, she insists expressing her opinion is important and states:

When there's an interesting topic going on, something I want to join, I would just appeal to everyone that I have this kind of idea or notion about this topic. I don't think I will hesitate to talk about my experiences or feelings about the topic. If I

disagree to someone's idea, I would say that I'm not interested. I will still express myself strongly, not in an aggressive way, but I won't just sit there and be quiet. I express what I want to say.. I just don't hesitate to bring that up. I think it's because I don't feel uncomfortable communicating with others. I don't think I have a problem with that. (Participant 3)

However, there were participants who were more comfortable listening to what other members in the groups say during team meetings. In the case of participant 9, who has been working in a sales and services department for 1 year, he said:

I usually try to listen to other members in the group. If I have something to add, then I speak up. I try my best not to hurt others' feelings when I disagree with them. But when I strongly believe that my opinion needs to be heard to make the decision or come to a conclusion, I express my feelings on the topic. (Participant 9)

While expression of thoughts and ideas is a common habitual practice to recognize the concept of self in the United States, returnees especially those from Western cultures are known to have a tendency to be direct and assert their opinions freely. Yet, many cultural contexts in

East Asia understand a person in a relational entity rather than an independent entity (Kim & Markus, 2002; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Minoura, 1988). In order to avoid giving offense and refrain from making spontaneous or critical remarks, the East Asian culture does not require clear, explicit verbal articulation but relies on presumptions shared by people, non-verbal signals such as body movements, and the very situation in which the interaction occurs. For this reason, East Asians are known to favor verbal hesitancy and ambiguity (Huang, 1993; Kim, 1985). However, as the participants spent their youth where communication involves intensively elaborated expressions that do not need much situational interpretation and require sense (nunchi), they experienced confusion towards these different expression styles. As returnees have a tendency to be direct and assert their opinions freely (Minoura, 1988), both co-workers and returnees go through difficulties in getting used to one another's expression styles. Yet, returnees' active participation in expressing their ideas or questioning helps them to understand and readjust to the Korean society quickly and furthermore increases their life satisfaction in Korea.

### **High self confidence in English: Strength and Stress**

Individuals, who express themselves smoothly, often feel high self-esteem and sense of self-ability. English fluency, obtained by sojourning in an English-speaking society, can lead to self-conviction

and self-esteem. This was also seen in the collected interview data. Many participants mentioned their English ability helped them to adjust to their surroundings and workplaces, and were very confident with their English abilities. They believed that having fluent English speaking skills worked as a great advantage, especially during recruitment and when employed at a foreign-affiliated company. Nowadays, as many companies are multinational companies, the participants mentioned they are usually assigned to divisions, which require high-level English skills such as foreign investment and distribution. The participants stated that they see their English abilities as one of their strengths which helped them to get recruited. Yet, they also emphasized the pressures by their seniors as seniors expect them to be a perfect bilingual and have fluent English speaking skills. Participant 5 and participant 10, who both studied abroad for more than 10 years, expressed the importance of their English-speaking skills were. As a clinical research assistant, participant 5 mentioned the advantages of having good English skills and indicated the following:

I currently work at a foreign-affiliated company, where English is mandatory. Because of this, having good English abilities really works as a great advantage. For example, I understand the directions when it is spoken to me once, while my co-workers need to hear it one more time. This really

helped me get used to my current company and saves me time. But my seniors and co-workers expect me to speak English fluently, and be able to translate any documents from English to Korean, or vice versa, quickly. So that's tiresome.

(Participant 5)

Participant 10, who works in a content strategy department, also agrees with participant 5. He said:

I'm currently working at a division, where a lot of work is done in English. So my co-workers would frequently approach me and ask for help and I think that really helped me to get used to the system here. But the bad part is, at work my seniors expect my English skills to be very superior. It's not just like "Oh you have good English skills right?" it's more like they expect me to speak English as if it was my mother language.. like a native speaker. So that's overwhelming at times. (Participant 10)

Participant 1's working environment requires employees to communicate in English, therefore she believes her English ability was a great advantage to her. She commented:

I always use English to communicate because it is a multinational company, so my English ability seems to be a

great advantage to me. Some people who I work with are more comfortable in English. But I feel pressure when my seniors expect me to be a “perfect” bilingual... but unfortunately I’m not. There are times when I can’t find or even think of the right words in Korean when I know what it is in English and sometimes vice versa. (Participant 1)

Participant 7 encountered situations where seniors and other co-workers had high English expectations for him. Although he is included in projects which require corporation with foreigners and feels comfortable when faced with these situations, he also mentioned the frustration towards the high expectations others had towards him. He said:

Many people expect me to have really fluent English speaking skills. There are times when I get stuck, and when this happens they just can’t understand why. Other than that, I think my English ability helps me when it comes to the situation where I have to work with foreigners and discuss issues. I think I am more capable to get more chances and information. (Participant 7)

As Mak (1997) introduced highly qualified Hong Kong Chinese who are fluent in English are well-placed to take advantage in

the context of globalization and internationalization, this also applied to the participants for the current study. Previous studies conducted by Yoshida et al. (2009) indicated the returnees experienced people expecting fluency in English. As returnees have the image of growing up overseas, many tend to believe these returnees effortlessly become bilingual. Yet, many returnees struggle with the acquisition of at least one language and the retention of the other. For this reason, although the participants believe their English fluency works as a great advantage and feel self-confident during recruitment, it also accompanies the stress due to the expectation of fluent English like a native speaker. Despite of this stress, many returnees felt their high levels of English as one of their unique strengths, which leads to self-conviction and self-esteem.

### **Interpersonal communication difficulties**

A majority of the participants mentioned having a few linguistic difficulties at their workplaces, due to their interpersonal communication abilities. These linguistic difficulties included traditional idioms and Korean-Chinese words. Participants replied they faced these difficulties because they were more familiarized in using simple and casual Korean rather than Korean-Chinese words. As these idioms and Korean-Chinese words are usually taught during middle and high school years in Korea, participants seemed to have a hard time

understanding these words, because of the lack of education. However, all participants mentioned they easily got used to it and no longer considered it as an obstacle when communicating with others. Although participant 1 attended high school and college overseas for 6 years, she still experienced some linguistic difficulties. She explained:

When I was studying abroad in the United States, I only used simple and casual Korean words with my friends. But here, they use difficult words or those words which are in Chinese characters and those I have trouble understanding. These words are actually taught during middle and high school years in Korea, and I was not able to receive full education on that part. So I think that's the hard part when communicating with my co-workers. (Participant 1)

Despite of these linguistic difficulties, which participant 1 experienced, participant 1 mentioned her co-workers' help of explaining the meaning of the words. After hearing these words frequently, participant 1 became familiar and used to it. Participant 2, who is a business manager, agrees with participant 1 as she went through linguistic difficulties during her readjustment in her workplace:

There were linguistic difficulties for me when I was trying to get a job. All these major big companies require applicants to know there Korean-Chinese words but to be honest.. I only



went to middle school here in Korea so I have no clue on that which makes me feel I'm out of the game. But if I don't understand them, all I need to do is ask what they mean and they will clarify it out for me. (Participant 2)

Participant 4, who attended a private school while studying abroad overseas for 10 years, also mentioned she experienced some linguistic difficulties. She said:

Except for the first few months in Korea, there really weren't any linguistic difficulties. There were some seemingly hard traditional idioms and Korean-Chinese words that I had a hard time to understand at the beginning, but I learned the meanings of the commonly used words so I got used to them soon. (Participant 4)

Participant 7, who attended a private school while he studied abroad, also agrees with the above participants that he did experience some linguistic difficulties at the beginning but does not consider it as a big problem. He said:

I have no trouble at all when it comes to communication with my co-workers, but when it comes to intense discussions.. that's when I feel the existence of linguistic difficulty. During these intense discussions, all these idioms and Korean-

Chinese words pop out unexpectedly and I try to stay calm and try to guess the meaning by listening to the context of the speech. But it's getting better. (Participant 7)

It was noted that 'reverse culture shock' was apparent when returnees were coping with the changes in interpersonal communication (Chaban et al., 2011). Interpersonal communication acts as a significant factor for human relationships. If one can communicate well with another, it becomes easier to understand the other and oneself. As communication plays an important role for both host and home country's cultural adaptation in a most direct and significant way, Hall (1990) and Gudykunst et al. (1996) claims culture is communication and communication is culture. Harmonious relationships, increase in self-confidence and life satisfaction will increase through communication and can predict returnees' positive social adjustment during their readjustment to Korea. For this reason, overcoming the interpersonal communication difficulties is significant for returnees as they readjust to the Korean society. Similar findings by Yoshida et al. (2003) also indicated the returnees' lack of Japanese proficiency and tendency to be direct were the top listed differences or disadvantages which cause the Japanese returnees' peers to perceive returnees differently. In spite of the difficulties, in which the participants experienced, it can be seen the participants successively overcame the

interpersonal communication difficulties by learning the technique of communication styles to cope with readjustment difficulties which corresponds to Sasagawa et al.'s (2006) research findings.

### **Life Satisfaction in Korea**

Previous researchers define life satisfaction as a person's assessment of his life in general or how close his life is to the ideal (Schimmack et al., 2002). As the population of returnees is increasing, it is important to understand how satisfied returnees are with their life in Korea and are socially readjusting well within the Korean society. The interview data from the participants could be categorized into two sub-themes.

**“Satisfied”** Most of the participants mentioned that they are satisfied with their overall life in Korea. Although these participants mentioned they had a hard time readjusting back to the Korean society, they were very satisfied with their overall life in Korea. They mentioned the support from family, friends and even co-workers helped them to find their own pace within their workplaces and to get used to the system. Both participant 5 and participant 10 stated they were currently satisfied. They stated:

I am currently satisfied with my workplace. I like how I can combine my professional knowledge in medicine and language skill in my current occupation as a clinical research

associate. Also, I'm proud to be a part of the healthcare industry, working to promote health and well-being of the people. It was easy for me to become one of my co-workers. I submerged into the system and adjusted myself to fit into the corporate system. However, I try not to be too adjusted and keep an open-minded attitude. I got used to my company's convention, so I'm quite familiar to it. (Participant 5)

I'm actually very satisfied with my life right now. I feel the field that I am working in has a great influence in my company, which makes me feel that I am not working for nothing. I think the field where I'm working in is a field which can develop greatly in the future, so I like the fact that I can continue working in this field. I really like the large compensation or the bonus I receive. (Participant 10)

Participant 2 insisted she had a hard time for 1 year, but with the support from family and friends, she was able to settle down. She said:

To be honest, I really had a hard time getting used to the Korean society for one year. I think this is why I couldn't settle down for six months. During this period, I had my family and friends so I could hold on. Since I've been working in the Korean society for 3-4 years, I'm pretty used

to the Korean culture and I am very satisfied with my life now. (Participant 2).

Participant 4 stated that she enjoyed her graduate school life in Korea. She said:

I am absolutely satisfied with my life in Korea. There are times when I miss some moments and things in the United States occasionally, but I love this time of my life in Korea. I think this is also because I'm enjoying my graduate school life here. The absolute privacy is the best thing. My colleagues only pay attention to their own tasks; no one ever touches other's work and meddles in anything. But they are so kind and helpful at the same time. I didn't have a hard time adjusting to the Korean system here because my work list is clear and I got to learn most elements I had to know before I actually began working. (Participant 4)

Another graduate student, participant 3, emphasized how much she loved her life back in Korea. She said:

I love it here in Korea. I enjoy every element of it. I didn't think I would enjoy it this much, but actually I like it here. I feel like I belong here. My co-workers are very nice, so I am very satisfied with my work place too. I feel like I'm

enjoying my job so much. I don't have any problems with talking to anyone or discussing problems like that. I'm very happy. (Participant 3)

By readjusting quickly to the deeply rooted Confucianism Korean society, the participants mentioned they are very satisfied with their current occupation and overall life in Korea. They stated they feel what they are doing is valuable, resulting their overall life in Korea to be satisfied. Another common factor is most of these participants worked for over one year. Kobayashi et al. (1978, 1983) found that 90.5% of Japanese returnee children adjusted back to the Japanese school life within a year. For this reason, it can be assumed that the participants, who worked for more than one year, are more used to the Korean society, which results higher life satisfaction in Korea.

**“It's okay”** Some participants mentioned that their overall life in Korea is okay. These participants shared that they are not quite satisfied with their occupation, yet support from co-workers have helped them get used to the company's convention. Participant 1 and participant 4 both agreed they are getting used to their surroundings. Participant 1 said:

It is hard to say yes, but it is okay so far.. Sometimes it's difficult though. But compared to my previous job, I am happy. I used to do a lot of overtime work before, but now I

usually get home before 8. I'm getting used to our company's internal system by just trying to think like one of my co-workers. I actually feel much more relaxed back in the United States sometimes because people care less about others. I feel like people here take too much unnecessary attention for others. But this part also helped me to get used to the Korean culture. I feel more comfortable here in Korea so I think my general life in Korea is okay so far. I think I got used to the Korean culture because of my personality: I am willing to try new stuff, learn anything that interests me and try hard enough to achieve the best I can. (Participant 1)

Participant 7 agrees with participant 1 and stated:

My life here in Korea is okay. I'm pretty satisfied with my work here because working in a management team is something I always wanted to do at some point of my life, and I like my co-workers who have strong thirst for knowledge, intellectual curiosity and ambition. That really instigates me to continue on. Although I had a hard time getting used to the Korean culture embedded within my company, I'm okay now. The help from my teammates and shaping myself to fit my team helped. (Participant 7)

These participants, who stated their life in Korea to be “okay”, mentioned that they were not happy about their occupation, due to overtime work. In order to readjust to their current surroundings, the participants said they tried to blend in to their surroundings by adopting self-expression and interpersonal communication styles. This is not an uncommon situation as Kidder (1992) claimed in his research that some returnees, who considered themselves ‘different’ from others, adopted “chameleon-like techniques to blend in with the occasion and change colors according to context” (p. 390). As a result of this, it can be assumed that occupation satisfaction affects the participants’ overall life satisfaction in Korea, but can be mediated by readjusting to the surroundings.



## **Summary**

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the returnees' social adjustment in Korea, who sojourned overseas for a long period of time. Challenges and difficulties, which the participants experienced, were identified while investigating the participants' life stories. The reported difficulties include the following: (a) boundary ambivalence of ideological orientations between group and individual, especially lack of privacy, (b) negative stereotypes on returnees, as 'Americans', (c) no sense (nunchi) by expressing their opinions directly, (d) high self confidence in English: strength and stress, and (e) interpersonal communication difficulties. Though they have some difficulties during their readjustment the returnees reported that they are satisfied with their life in Korea.

## VI. DISCUSSION

Studying in a foreign country exposes international students to new cultures and opportunities. These international students are sent overseas by their parents, especially during their adolescence, because their parents are unsatisfied with the Korean education system and wish their children to speak their second language fluently like a native speaker. As returnees bring back different perspectives, skills, ideas, discussions and problem solving skills, they are capable to stimulate and enhance Korea's economic development. These returnees, who are emerging adults, experience identity confusion as adulthood has come to a delay, due to the delay of marriage and parenthood until the mid or late twenties for most people in industrialized or postindustrial societies. For this reason, the significance of *emerging adulthood*, especially ages 18-25, is increasing. Hence, the focus of the current study is to investigate emerging adult returnees' difficulties and life satisfaction, who continuously explore their identity during their successful readjustment to Korea. Yet, during their readjustment back to Korea, returnees are often faced by challenges and difficulties. It is important to help these returnees' readjustment to Korea, because if they decide to return back to the host country, due to the failure of readjustment, this is not only a national economic loss, but can provoke social issues such

as separated families. Before providing readjustment advices for these returnees, it is important to acknowledge the difficulties which returnees experience during the readjustment process.

The purpose of this study was to examine the in-depth stories, which returnees, who studied abroad overseas during their adolescence, experienced during their readjustment process to Korea. Five major themes were constructed through the interviews of ten returnees, who readjusted back to Korea successively and were willing to participate:

(a) boundary ambivalence of ideological orientations between group and individual, especially lack of privacy, (b) negative stereotypes on returnees, as ‘Americans’, (c) no sense (nunchi) by expressing their opinions directly, (d) high self confidence in English: strength and stress, and (e) interpersonal communication difficulties.

Though they experience some difficulties as they readjust back to Korea, returnees reported that they are satisfied with their life. Generalizability of these findings is limited by the selection of participants, as they were returnees who successively readjusted back to the Korean society.

### **Reverse Culture Shock and Readjustment**

All participants went through reverse culture shock, but as the participants were successively readjusted returnees, most of them recovered from the reverse culture shock within one year. This

corresponds to the findings by Gaw (2000), because returnees experienced re-entry shock as they sojourned in the host country for a long period of time. Here, it was clear that the participants go through the stages of re-entry which were presented by Oberg (1960) and Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963). Throughout the investigation of the participants' stories, it could be seen that all participants did not go through a honeymoon stage. They seemed to be aware of what they will be experiencing through talks with parents and friends who repatriated back to Korea earlier. This corresponds to Storti (2003), which states "The more familiar the returnee is with changes in the home culture/company, the easier the reentry" (p.63). However, the effects of readjustment may differ from each participant (Wolfe, 2005), as each returnee can view the same situation in a different perspective. Additionally, the time period which the participants returned might have also been influenced as all participants repatriated back to Korea during recruitment seasons, they were busy attending career fairs for information or started to study for the recruitment or graduate school admission exams. Also, all participants mentioned having a job or getting into graduate school helped them focus on their work and readjust quickly.

### **Encountering Challenges and Difficulties**

Despite of the participants' successful readjustment back to

Korea, they often encountered challenges and difficulties during re-entry which require many readjustments to their values (Sussman, 2000; Wolfe, 2005). Within their workplaces or graduate school, the participants encountered unfamiliar cultural differences, which were hierarchy and seniority of human relationship and lack of priorities in their lives. Due to the deeply rooted Confucianism principles in the Korean society, moral traditions present basic human relations are fundamentally hierarchical including respect and obligation (Cha, 1994; Park & Shin, 2006). Although the participants were familiar with these cultural values, they were exposed to individualistic cultures which encourage individuals to be independent, autonomous and to have self-esteem (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). Due to their double exposure of two different cultures, the returnees found the social hierarchy and lack of priorities on their private life difficult to adjust.

Participants also experienced stereotypes by their seniors and co-workers. Although they identified themselves as Koreans, fellow colleagues, co-workers and seniors maintained stereotypes towards study abroad students and returnees as ‘very American’ (Participant 3), ‘not used to Korean culture’ (Participant 6), and ‘more open-minded to everything’ (Participant 9). Participants did experience self-identity shifts at certain situations, due to their ‘Americanized ideas and thoughts’, but their strong sense of identity as a Korean instigated their

smooth readjustment and increase of life satisfaction in Korea (Campbell, 1981; Diener, 1984; Diener & Diener, 1995; Judge et al., 2005; Leung & Leung, 1992; Morganti et al., 1988; Piccolo et al., 2005).

As the participants spent their youth where communication does not require much situational interpretation, they experience confusion and difficulties towards sharing new ideas (Antal, 2001) and the different expression styles - not assertive and more likely in a directive expression, which is recommended by the Korean society. However, their active participation in expressing their ideas or questioning helps their readjustment to the Korean study as actively expressing one's opinion is one of the significant factors for positive adjustment.

Viewing their high level of English as one of the unique strengths, the participants had high self confidence in English. Mak (1997) introduced highly qualified Hong Kong Chinese who were fluent in English are well-placed to take advantage in the context of globalization and internationalization, which also applied for the participants in the current study. They believed their English ability worked as a great advantage, especially during recruitment and when employed at a foreign-affiliated company. However, this also accompanied stresses because of the expectation of fluent English like

a native speaker. Yoshida et al. (2009) indicated returnees struggle with the acquisition of at least one language and the retention of the other, but many tend to believe returnees become bilingual effortlessly. Despite of the accompanied stress, many returnees consider their high levels of English as their strengths, which leads to self-conviction and self-esteem.

Finally, returnees cope with the changes in interpersonal communication (Chaban et al., 2011). As interpersonal communication acts as a significant factor for human relationships, it plays an important role for both host and home country's cultural adaptation in a most direct and significant way. This is because harmonious relationships and increase in self-confidence and life satisfaction is caused by communication.

Returnees have a task to change from western communication styles, which focus on individual's interest and emotion, to the Korean style which focuses on human relationship and others' emotions. Even though they have some difficulties while readjusting, returnees successively overcame the interpersonal communication difficulties by learning the technique of communication styles to cope with readjustment difficulties which correspond to Sasagawa et al.'s (2006) research findings.

Returnees indicated strategies to overcome the difficulties they

encountered during readjustment were: (a) focusing on their work, (b) transforming themselves at their own pace and time, and (c) accepting the society norm.

### **Limitation**

Although the current study makes many strides towards our understanding of returnees' life satisfaction in Korea, some limitations should be considered when generalizing the findings. First, it is hard to generalize the findings as all participants successively readjusted back to Korea and are either employed or attending graduate school in Korea. As the participants no longer feel the frustration due to unemployment, this might have influenced their life satisfaction. Additionally, the participants were either working in a department where high level of English is required or foreign-affiliated corporation which might have instigated them to have a positive life satisfaction in Korea. For this reason, there is a need to consider comparing the life satisfactions of unemployed and employed returnees and specifying their occupation and department for future studies.

Another limitation can be pointed out as there were only ten participants, who participated in the in-depth interview. Among these ten participants, two attended an international school. These participants were included because international schools are based on the American education system. However, these participants attended



international schools as they were living in Korea, so their surrounding environment might have influenced them to readjust well to the Korean society. For this reason, future studies should consider the findings of the current study and investigate whether corresponding results appear in quantitative research with a large population of participants.

It should be noted that the host country where the participants studied abroad might have influenced the results. It would be interesting if future studies consider conducting a comparative research between returnees who studied at an East Asian culture with collectivistic values and those who studied at a Western culture with individualistic values.

### **Implications**

Despite of the limitations stated above, the current study illustrates some important points regarding difficulties experienced by successively readjusted returnees. As the population of returnees, who completed their studies, are increasing, it is important to examine the challenges and obstacles faced during their re-entry to Korea. By investigating these successively readjusted returnees' process of re-acculturation to the Korean society, the findings of the current study can offer general information about the difficulties returnees experience and help them readjust to their own cultures and benefit from their experiences. In order to successively readjust back to the Korean

society, future returnees must be aware of the following mentioned difficulties: perception of the boundary ambivalence between ideological orientations, negative stereotypes on returnees, no sense (nunchi) and direct expression of their opinions, high self confidence in English: strength and stress, and interpersonal communication difficulties. As a result, the findings provide the difficulties in which Korean returnees, who successively readjusted back to Korea, experienced and can be applied as a reference to future studies related to repatriated adult returnees readjusting to their home countries.

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# APPENDIX

IRB No. 1309/001-005

유효기간: 2014년 9월 9일

## 연구참여자 모집

○ 연구과제 : Back to the Korean: Society: Protective · Disruptive Factors of Parachute Returnees from North America

미국에서 발표한 통계에 따르면 미국의 유학생 수 중, 한국유학생이 1위를 기록하였습니다. 최근 한국유학생들의 현황을 알아본 결과, 해외 유학 출국학생과 해외 유학 귀국학생의 수가 증가하였습니다. 특히나 유학 후 해당국가 체류 희망도를 조사해본 결과, 유학 뒤 귀국하겠다는 답변이 47.8%로 높은 비중을 차지했습니다. 하지만 조기 유학을 빠르게 마치게 귀국한 유학귀국생들은 해외에서 받던 교육과 다른 교육 시스템과 새로운 친구 사귀기를 어려워하는 것으로 밝혀졌습니다.

본 연구는 유학을 경험한 귀국학생들이 한국 사회생활 적응에 도움이 되는 보호요인과 어려움을 느끼게 하는 방해요인들이 무엇인지 알아보고, 이 요인들이 한국 사회생활 적응 및 만족도에 미치는 영향을 알아보고자 합니다. 이에 따라, 유학 귀국 후 한국 사회생활을 최소 1년을 한 성인을 대상으로 심층면접을 실시하여 기초자료를 수집하고자 합니다.

연구참여자의 개인정보는 철저히 비밀이 보장되며, 수집된 자료는 연구 자료로만 사용됩니다. 또한 본인의 판단에 따라 참여를 철회하실 수 있습니다.

### ○ 모집대상

연구 참여자는 유학 귀국 후, 한국 사회생활을 최소 1년을 한 성인 약10명입니다.

### ○ 모집기간

2013년 9월 9일부터 2013년 9월 20일까지

(2주일 예정이며 시기는 필요에 따라 변경될 수 있음)

### ○ 참여방법

참여에 동의한 성인은 연구자로부터 하루 전날 미리 주요 질문 사항들을 전달 받고, 심층면접을 진행하기 전에 연구자에게 연구에 대한 간략한 설명을 들을 것입니다. 사전공지 후, 하루 전날 미리 받은 유학생들과 유학 귀국 후의 한국 사회생활에 관한 질문 사항들에 응답하게 됩니다. 소요시간은 약 30분 정도입니다. 모든 과정은 연구참여자 학교 및 직장 근처 공공장소에서 진행될 예정입니다.

### ○ 연락처

본 연구에 대해 질문이 있으시면 다음 연구 담당자에게 문의하여 주시기 바랍니다.

서울대학교 생활과학대학 아동가족학과 박혜지(010- - )

만일 어느 때라도 연구참여자로서 귀하의 권리에 대한 질문이 있다면 다음의 서울대학교 생명윤리심의위원회에 연락하십시오.

서울대학교 생명윤리심의위원회 (SNUIRB) (전화번호: 02-880-5153)

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## 1) 인터뷰 (10명)

1인당 약 30분이 소요될 예정입니다. 조사원이 편안한 분위기에서 대상과 함께 한국 사회생활 적응에서의 즐겁거나 힘든 점과 만족도에 대해 알아보고자 합니다. 인터뷰 진행 시, 녹음을 실시할 예정입니다. 귀하는 언제든지 어떠한 불이익 없이 참여 도중에 그만 둘 수 있기 때문에, 만일 귀하가 대답하고 싶지 않은 질문이 있거나 연구에 참여하는 것을 그만두고 싶다면, 담당 연구원이나 연구 책임자에게 즉시 말씀해주시시오.

## 1) Interview (10 people)

We are expecting approximately about 30 minutes per person. The researcher will be asking questions about your pleasant or difficult moments and satisfaction at your current occupation and Korean society. We would like to inform you the interview will be recorded for data collection. As you are free to stop your participation at anytime without any disadvantages, if there are questions which you do not wish to answer or wish to stop participating in the research, please inform the researcher at once.

## 2) 설문지 (200명)

설문조사는 한국 사회생활 적응에 도움이 됐다고 생각하는 특징들과 만족에 관한 것으로 총 20분 정도 소요될 것입니다.

## 2) Questionnaire (200 people)

The questionnaire will be about the characteristics which you believe helped or gave you a hard time to adjust and your satisfaction to the Korean society. It will take approximately 20 minutes.

위의 모든 과정은 조용하고 편안한 공공장소에서 이루어 질 것이며, 설문지 작성은 본인 덕에서 하실 수도 있습니다.

All mentioned above will be processed in a quiet and comfortable public place, and the questionnaire may be taken home to complete.

## 4. 연구 참여 기간은 얼마나 됩니까?

인터뷰 참여 시, 참여 시간은 최대 30분이며, 설문지 참여 시에는 최대 20분 정도 소요 할 것이므로 둘 다 참여할 시에는 약 50분이 소요될 것입니다.

We are expecting to spend max. 30 minutes for the interview and max. 20 minutes for the questionnaire. As a result, when participating both methods, it will take approximately 50 minutes.

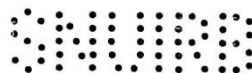
## 5. 참여 도중 그만두어도 됩니까?

예, 귀하는 언제든지 어떠한 불이익 없이 참여 도중에 그만 둘 수 있습니다. 만일 귀하가 연구에 참여하는 것을 그만두고 싶다면 담당 연구원이나 연구 책임자에게 즉시 말씀해 주십시오.

Yes, you are free to stop your participation anytime without any disadvantage. If you wish to stop, please inform the researcher at once.

## 6. 부작용이나 위험요소는 없습니까?

부작용이나 위험요소는 없습니다. 다만, 인터뷰 중에 개인적이거나 이야기하기 싫은 내용이 있을 시에는 연구원에게 말씀해주시면 다음 질문으로 넘어가도록 하겠습니다. 이 외에 만일



연구 참여 과정과 관련하여 질문이 있으시면 담당 연구원에게 문의해 주십시오.

There are no side effects nor risk factors in this study. However, if you believe some of the questions require too much personal information or do not wish to talk about it, please notify the researcher to proceed to the next question. If there are any other questions related to this study's participation process, feel free to contact the researcher.

#### 7. 이 연구에 참여시 참여자에게 이득이 있습니까?

귀하가 이 연구에 참여하는데 있어서 직접적인 이득은 없습니다. 그러나 귀하가 제공하는 정보는 유학 후 귀국하여 한국 사회생활을 하는 귀국생들에 대한 이해를 증진하는데 도움이 될 것입니다.

There is no direct advantages for participating in this research. Yet, the provided information will enhance our knowledge about parachute returnees participating in the Korean society.

#### 8. 만일 이 연구에 참여하지 않는다면 불이익이 있습니까?

귀하는 본 연구에 참여하지 않을 자유가 있습니다. 또한, 귀하가 본 연구에 참여하지 않아도 귀하에게는 어떠한 불이익도 없습니다.

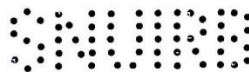
You have the right in order not to participate in this study. Additionally, there will be no disadvantages for not participating.

#### 9. 연구에서 얻은 모든 개인 정보의 비밀은 보장됩니까?

개인정보관리책임자는 서울대학교의 박해지 (010- - )입니다. 저희는 이 연구를 통해 얻은 모든 개인 정보의 비밀 보장을 위해 최선을 다할 것입니다. 이 연구에서 얻어진 개인 정보가 학회지나 학회에 공개 될 때 귀하의 이름과 다른 개인 정보는 사용되지 않을 것입니다. 그러나 만일 법이 요구하면 개인의 개인정보는 제공될 수도 있습니다. 또한 모니터 요원, 점검 요원, 생명윤리심의위원회는 연구참여자의 개인 정보에 대한 비밀 보장을 침해하지 않고 관련규정이 정하는 범위 안에서 본 연구의 실시 절차와 사료의 신뢰성을 검증하기 위해 연구 결과를 직접 열람할 수 있습니다. 귀하가 본 동의서에 서명하는 것은, 이러한 사항에 대하여 사전에 알고 있었으며 이를 허용한다는 동의로 간주될 것입니다.

Hyeji Park(010- - ) is responsible for managing your personal information. We will do our best to guarantee keeping all personal information for research purpose only. Your personal information will not be used when this study is published through an academic journal or association. Yet, your personal information may be provided when the law requires it. Also, in order to inspect the study's process and reliability, monitoring agents, inspection agents and the Institutional Review Board(IRB) may read through the study results within the relative regulations by not violating your confidential personal information. By signing the following consent form, you acknowledge to know what has been mentioned above and agree on it.

#### 10. 이 연구에 참가하면 댓가가 지급됩니까?



IRB No. 1309/001-005

유효기간: 2014년 9월 9일

귀하의 연구 참여시 감사의 뜻으로 문화상품권 5000 원이 증정될 것입니다.  
For your participation, the researcher will provide you a gift voucher of 5000won.

**11. 연구에 대한 문의는 어떻게 해야 됩니까?**

본 연구에 대해 질문이 있거나 연구 중간에 문제가 생길 시 다음 연구 담당자에게 연락하십시오.

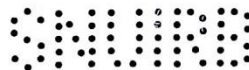
If there are any problems or questions about the study, please contact the following researcher:

이름: 박혜지                      전화번호: 010-                      -

만일 어느 때라도 연구참여자로서 귀하의 권리에 대한 질문이 있다면 다음의 서울대학교 생명윤리심의위원회에 연락하십시오.

If there are any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Seoul National University Institutional Review Board(SNUIRB).

서울대학교 생명윤리심의위원회 (SNUIRB)                      전화번호: 02-880-5153





## 동 의 서

1. 나는 이 설명서를 읽었으며 담당 연구원과 이에 대하여 의논하였습니다.
2. 나는 위험과 이득에 관하여 들었으며 나의 질문에 만족할 만한 답변을 얻었습니다.
3. 나는 이 연구에 참여하는 것에 대하여 자발적으로 동의합니다.
4. 나는 심층면접(인터뷰)을 할 때, 담당 연구자가 녹음을 한 후, 나에 대한 정보를 수집하고 처리하는데 동의합니다.
5. 나는 이 연구에서 얻어진 나에 대한 정보를 현행 법률과 생명윤리심의위원회 규정이 허용하는 범위 내에서 연구자가 수집하고 처리하는데 동의합니다.
6. 나는 담당 연구자나 위임 받은 대리인이 연구를 진행하거나 결과 관리를 하는 경우와 보건 당국, 학교 당국 및 서울대학교 생명윤리심의위원회가 실태 조사를 하는 경우에는 비밀로 유지되는 나의 개인 신상 정보를 직접적으로 열람하는 것에 동의합니다.
7. 나는 언제든지 이 연구의 참여를 철회할 수 있고 이러한 결정이 나에게 어떠한 해도 되지 않을 것이라는 것을 압니다.
8. 나의 서명은 이 동의서의 사본을 받았다는 것을 뜻하며 연구 참여가 끝날 때까지 사본을 보관하겠습니다.
1. I have read the following instructions and discussed about it with the researcher.
2. I have learned about the risks and benefits and was satisfied with the responses to my questions.
3. I voluntarily agree on participating to this study.
4. I agree to allow the researcher to record and store my information during the in-depth interview.
5. I agree to allow the researcher to collect, record and store my information within the current law and Institutional Review Board regulations.
6. I agree to allow the researcher or authorized representative to proceed with the study or allow the University and Seoul National University Institutional Review Board to view my confidential personal information only when investigating the study's situation and managing the results.
7. I have been acknowledged that I am able to withdraw from the study anytime, and this decision will not provide me risks.
8. By signing this agreement, I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this agreement and will keep it with me until the research participation ends

연구참여자 성명  
(Participant's name)

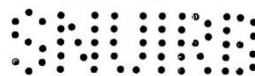
서명  
(Signature)

날짜 (년/월/일)  
Date (YYYY/MM/DD)

동의서 받은 연구원 성명  
(Name of Recipient of consent form)

서명  
(Signature)

날짜 (년/월/일)  
Date (YYYY/MM/DD)



# 국 문 초 록

## 청소년기 유학생들의 귀국 후, 재적응 경험

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이 연구는 유학을 마치고 한국으로 돌아온 유학생들의 귀국 후 경험하는 적응의 어려움과 삶 만족도에 대해 알아보고자 하였다. 본 연구는 한국에 성공적으로 재적응한 귀국 유학생들과의 심층면접을 통하여 재적응시 겪은 어려움과 전반적인 삶의 만족도에 대해 알아보았다.

이러한 연구목적에 따라, 본 연구는 10명의 귀국 유학생들을 유목적 표집법을 통해 심층면접을 진행했다. 수집된 자료는 내러티브 연구와 내용 및 주제 분석을 이용하여 분석하였다.

연구의 주요 결과는 다음과 같다. 모든 연구 참여자들은 역문화 쇼크를 경험하였으며, 이념적 정향의 개인주의와 집합주의 가치 혼란, 귀국 유학생에 대한 오해들, 눈치 없는 직접 표현 방식, 높은 영어 자신감의 장단점과 대인 의사소통의 어려움이었다. 이러한 어려움을 극복하고 참여자 모두는 한국 생활에 만족하고 있다. 이 연구는 성공적으로 적응한 귀국 유학생에 대한 조사라는 한계점이 있음에도 불구하고 성인이 된 귀국 유학생들에 대한 자료를 제공하



고 유학 귀국생의 적응과 그에 대한 국가정책 개발에 기여할 수 있을 것이다.

Keywords : 성인 귀국 유학생, 재문화변용, 삶 만족도, 적응 곤란

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